

No. II.

THE AMERICAN DRAMA.

THE

OATH OF OFFICE.

A Tragedy,

IN FIVE ACTS.

BY CHARLES JAMES CANNON.

WITH A PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR.

NEW YORK:

WILLIAM TAYLOR & CO., 18 ANN STREET.

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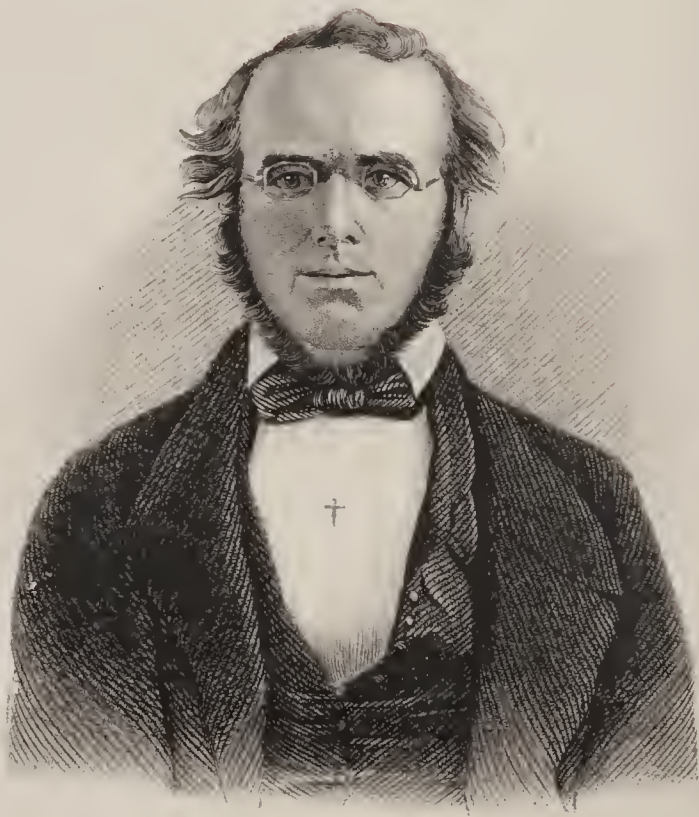
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C. J. Cannon

THE
OATH OF OFFICE.

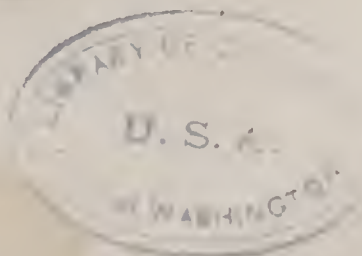
A Tragedy.

✓
BY CHARLES JAMES CANNON,
AUTHOR OF "THE POET'S QUEST," "THE CROWNING HOUR," "POEMS,
DRAMATIC AND MISCELLANEOUS," ETC.

NEW YORK:
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Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1854,

By CHARLES JAMES CANNON,

In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the Southern District
of New York.

a. m. P., Mar. 8, 1921.

TO FRANKLIN PIERCE.

CALLED from thy granite hills, and by a voice
As Heaven-inspired as his—the Prophet old—
The shepherd youth who summoned from the fold
To reign a monarch of th' Almighty's choice—
The voice of a Free People! to the seat
A Jackson honoured, and a Washington
Made holy, let not then, as oft is done,
Ambition with thy conscience play the cheat,
Thy soul to juggle of its richest gem—
Faith to thy country. Registered in Heaven
Now stands thy "Oath of Office," and shall stand
Forever, to approve thee or condemn,
As thou the power but lent to thee—not given—
Shalt use to bless or curse thy native land.

CHARACTERS.

JAMES LYNCH FITZSTEPHEN, *Mayor of Galway.*

WALTER LYNCH, *his son.*

BLAKE OF THE HILLS, *brother-in-law of Lynch.*

ARTHUR, *son of Blake.*

TIRLOGH, *foster-brother of Walter.*

GOMEZ, *a young Spaniard.*

PRIEST.

CAHIR, } *Citizens.*
MIHIL, }

GAOLER.

FIRST OFFICER.

SECOND OFFICER.

GENTLEMEN, SAILORS, CITIZENS, ETC.

DAME MARGARET, *wife of Lynch.*

AGNES, *the betrothed of Walter.*

LADIES, CITIZENS' WIVES, ETC.

SCENE.—*Galway, in Ireland.* TIME.—*Near the close of the Fifteenth century.*

THE OATH OF OFFICE.

A C T I.

SCENE I.

A hall in the house of the Mayor. A number of persons present; some seated at tables and others standing in groups, or walking about conversing. Among the latter are AGNES and GOMEZ. TIRLOGH comes from one of the tables.

TIRLOGH.

BRAVE doings here! In kitchen and in hall
Is nothing heard but sounds of merriment,
Where blend the laugh and song harmoniously
With music of the viol and the harp.
In every face one sees, as in a mirror,
The joy reflected that makes bright his own;
And in the friendly grasp, of hands that ne'er
Have met before, is felt the heartiness
With which each guest, in all this vast assembly,
Doth enter into these festivities.
And, sooth to say, Lynch the Munificent

Gives all a noble welcome. There is not
A Baron of the Pale so sumptuously
Could entertain his friends as doth this merchant,
Upon whose tables luxuries are crowded
To sate an epicure. And this profusion
Is all in honour of the proud alliance
This day contracted by young Walter Lynch,
This rich man's heir, and my dear foster-brother,
And O! may it be happy as 'tis proud!
For he deserves it should be.

[WALTER comes dejectedly down the hall; then stops, and leaning
against one of the pillars, appears to be regarding AGNES
and GOMEZ.]

How is this?

He hath not much the seeming of a bridegroom.
Pray Heaven he be not ill! Ah, I remember.
This is the last night of the sojourn here
Of the young Spaniard, Gomez, and his heart
Is now divided between joy and grief—
The lover and the friend. Shall I accost him?
No;—he were better pleased to be alone;
And so I'll leave him.

[Retires among the guests.]

WALTER, (coming farther down.)

It was but the fancy
Of a distempered brain. I know them both.
The stain of falsehood could not rest upon

The soul of either. Gomez is my friend;—
My brother;—bound to me by strongest ties;—
Beyond suspicion true. And Agnes—O
The angels, that in Heaven's court do wait,
Are not more pure than she! Then to the winds
I give my doubts to scatter as they will!

[*After a pause*

And yet I like not they should seem so well
To understand each other. Eyes are on them
Which may not read their actions as mine do.
The smile and blush, that follow every word
He breathes into the ear she bends towards him,
The evil heart might sadly misinterpret,
And evil tongues—What will not evil tongues?—
Convert to proofs of crime they have not dreamed of.
Well, let them do so. Shall my peace depend
On others' fancies, or my own convictions?
And, while I know my friend and love are true,
What need I care if false the world should deem them?

ARTHUR, (*coming from the nearest table.*)

Upon my troth, good coz, thou play'st the host
Right hospitably. All thy guests must feel
Much flattered, by thy efforts to make pleasant
The time they mean to pass beneath this roof,
In honour of thy most august betrothal.
Why, man, thy length of face, and moody silence
Are as ill suited to an hour like this

As was the Death's head at Egyptian feasts—
Filling with gloom the hearts that should be brimmed—
Even like our goblets—with the wine of gladness.
Come, rouse thee. Talk, and laugh, and drink, as I do.
Or, if thou wilt not, imitate, at least,
The gentle 'haviour of thy bride, sweet Agnes,
Who, though she says but little with her lips,
Discourses eloquently with her eyes—
And how those eyes can speak thou shouldst know well!—
To the swart Spaniard, who, if not thy friend,
I trow might very well be thought thy rival,
And one who urges no unthriving suit.

WALTER.

Tush, Arthur, this is folly! Thou to-night
All things behold'st through an uncertain medium,
And dost see nothing as in truth it is.
The wine cup hath such wondrous power, 'twill oft
To friendship give the form of rivalry.
Go, join thy fellows; and, ere thou shalt drain
Another goblet to thy mistress' beauty,
I will make one among you.

ARTHUR.

See thou dost;
And we will make thee soon forget that earth
E'er knew the stolid mar-sport, Gravity.

[Returns to the table.]

WALTER.

He might be thought my rival! Though 'twas flung
At random, to my heart that shaft was sped,
And there it rankles.

[Goes to the table, and fills a goblet.]

Friends, ye do not drink.

Come, fill. *[They fill.]* And let me now propose a
toast.

Our house's honoured guest;—the noble Gomez!

ALL.

The noble Gomez!

[They drink.]

WALTER.

In his name I thank you.

ARTHUR.

In faith, 'tis well thou dost; for he nor ears,
Nor tongue, nor aught has now for more than one.

WALTER, *(aside, and leaving the table.)*

Another shaft! But what a fool am I
To let the chatter of this brainless jay
So chafe me! Now they seek a place apart,
As if they felt the gaze of curious eyes,
And sought to shun it. I will mark them closely.
But how is this? I am not jealous? No!
I do not fear there can be aught between them
That could to nicest honour give offence.

Yet, for a moment's pastime, will I mark them.

[He returns to the pillar, against which he leans, while AGNES and GOMEZ, separating from the crowd, come down the hall, and stop opposite to him.]

AGNES.

Thou goest then to-morrow?

GOMEZ.

With the dawn.

Even now, her white wings spread to catch the breeze,
The bark impatient in the harbour waits
That is to bear me to my native Spain,
And the dear parents my heart leaps to name.
Yet, credit me, sweet lady, sad am I
To leave for ever this fair land of thine,
Whose hospitable homes have ever been
As open to me as my father's halls.

AGNES.

But sure this going cannot be for ever?
Thou wilt, I know, leave many a friend behind
Who would rejoice to see thee here again.
Walter will miss thee sadly.

GOMEZ.

At the risk

Of seeming selfish, I will say I hope so.
For I would grieve to think that one with whom
I've passed long months—and yet not long enough

For the enjoyment we together shared—
Should let mine image from his memory fall
As something all unworthy of his care.
And yet 'twere wise to count that so it will be,
Since with him leave I one who well might make
The truest heart prove recreant to friendship.
Thou soon, I fear, wilt teach him to forget me.

AGNES.

Nay, that I would not were it in my power,
But rather strive to keep within his breast
Thy memory alive, by speaking oft
Of him he loves, when thou art far away.
Yet scarce shall need do that. What Walter once
Has loved, he loves unchangeably; besides,
Thou art his other self, and with his life
Thy memory must live.

GOMEZ.

An easy task
It is to win us to the faith that we
Do hope is true. O may'st thou prove in this
A prophetess!

AGNES.

But thou wilt see my father?

GOMEZ.

I fear me much 'twill be impossible.

The noble Lynch will hold his revels late,
In honour of his son's most happy choice,
And, being my last night beneath his roof,
I cannot leave without a farewell blessing
From him who well has filled my father's place.

AGNES.

Yet, though it should be late, thou canst one moment
Snatch from the hour of thy departure, just
To bid adieu to one who loves thee well,
But who, alas! is all too ill to leave
His couch, even for the sake of a last word
To his old friend, thine honoured father. Then,
I pray thee, let me say that thou wilt come,
And take his farewell message?

GOMEZ.

As thou wilt.

It is not easy to deny thee, lady.

AGNES.

Thanks! Now I'll home, and cheer his kind old heart
With this good news. 'Twill bring him back his youth.

GOMEZ.

Pray Heaven it bring him that without which youth,
Much as 'tis prized, would be no blessing—health.
But go not yet. Thy absence cannot fail
To dim the light of joy that should illumine
The festive hall. Indeed we cannot part thee.

AGNES.

I am my father's nurse : and, though not well
Could I absent myself from this gay scene,
Prepared to honour one whom Lynch Fitzstephen
Deems not unworthy of a name like his,
Must not my patient longer leave alone,
To count in solitude the hours his daughter
Devotes to pleasure. But no farewell yet.
I'll see thee at the bedside of my father.

SERVANT, (*who has come from the upper end of the hall.*)
Sir, 'tis my master's wish to speak to you.

GOMEZ.

I come to him. Lady, I kiss thy hand.

[*Follows the servant up, and exit.*]

AGNES, (*who in crossing the hall encounters WALTER.*)
Where didst thou hide thyself? I have not seen thee
For the last hour, I'm sure.

WALTER, (*ironically.*)

And missed me, doubtless.

AGNES, (*gaily.*)

Thou thinkest now I'll flatter, and say, Yes.
But that I will not. No, I did not miss thee.

WALTER, (*bitterly.*)

I did not think thou could'st. My good friend Gomez
Took care of that. My place was well supplied.

AGNES.

It was.

WALTER.

No doubt; and might have been even longer?

AGNES.

It might. The conversation of thy friend—
So full of lofty, yet most grateful, thought,
And rich in that quaint lore which renders Spain
So dear to every lover of romance—
Would from the dull and careless win attention,
And I—or thou hast flattered—am not either.
He told me of a youth, in bondage held
By a Grenadian noble;—one who hated,
With Moslem hate, our pure and holy faith;—
And of a lovely maid—the bride betrothed
Of his most cruel master—who beheld,
With pity first, but very soon with love,
The Christian slave, and tasked her woman's wit
Thenceforth, how she the captive could assist
In sundering the chains, that galled his heart
More than his limbs.

WALTER.

And she succeeded?

AGNES.

Yes.

And, with the freedom he had languished for,

She gave him—what a loving, manly heart
Would higher prize—her fond and beauteous self!

WALTER.

'Twas liberal of her!—very liberal!
Thou thinkest so, dost not? And gladly would'st
Have played the part of the fair Moorish maiden,
And given life and liberty to him
Had won thy love?

AGNES.

Ay, would I. Who would not?
Nay, I would think me blessed—if other means
I had not to evince my heart's devotion—
If e'er the glorious privilege were mine,
To lay my life down for the friends I love.

WALTER.

A most heroic sentiment! and spoken
Right loftily!—but thrown away on one
Who would far rather that his friends should live
Than die for him. O from my soul I loathe
The mawkish cant of those upon whose lips
Are ever words of fealty and devotion!
A woman's love should in her life be seen;—
Not spoken in her words, but by her acts,
And those not such as vain romancers weave
Into loose tales, to which no modest ear
Should listen. He thou call'st my friend—

AGNES.

I call !

Is he not so ? I thought you were sworn brothers.

WALTER.

And who says we are not ? Yet, to my thought,
The friend who entertains a maiden's ear—
That maid already an affianced wife—
With tales of silly passion, which inflame
The heart, and render giddy the weak brain,
Has little of the care a friend should have
For a friend's peace.

AGNES.

I listen to thee, Walter,
But though mine ear takes in thy words, their sense
Escapes me quite. Possess me of thy meaning.

WALTER.

Then, to speak plainly, was it like a friend
So long for Gomez to keep thee engaged,
With the invention of some idle rhymers,
'Till he had drawn upon you every eye
In wonderment, and raised, in coarser minds,
Thoughts little flattering or to thee or me.

AGNES.

What mind so evil as to let a thought
Intrude would sully a true maiden's honour,
From circumstance like this ?

WALTER.

Such minds are many.

AGNES.

I'm sorry for it; for I would that all
Were barred against the entrance of such thoughts,
Which cannot fail to leave a trail behind
Worse than the serpent's.

WALTER.

We should then be careful
Not to give life to thoughts that purest minds
Could not bid freely welcome. Shall we from
The shadow shrink, and yet not fear the substance?

AGNES.

There's something in thy tone, more than thy words,
That tells me I have done amiss. But how?
Thou'lt not refuse to let me know my fault?

WALTER.

Thy deep attention to the tale of Gomez—
If tale he told—

AGNES.

Walter! If tale he told?
And think'st thou what I said a fabrication,
'Neath which I meanly something sought to hide
I would not dare to own? If, sir, so lightly
Thou dost esteem mine honour now, what surety

Have I, that more respect it shall receive
When in thy hands is placed a husband's power?
Heaven keep thee in thy senses! and farewell.

[*Going.*]

WALTER, (*detaining her.*)

But Agnes!—

AGNES, (*breaking from him.*)

Loose me! I will hear no more!

[*Exit at one side of the hall as DAME MARGARET enters at the other.*]

WALTER, (*looking after her.*)

Can she be false? O ne'er detected guilt
Could look so like insulted innocence.
Her tone, where anger was with sorrow mingled,
Her eye, whose fire was almost quenched in tears,
Her bearing proud, and yet so womanly,
Bear testimony all that she is true.

DAME MARGARET.

Is Agnes gone, and hast thou not gone with her?
Fie on thee, sir! is this thy gallantry?
'Tis rather soon, methinks, to play the churl,
The night of thy betrothal. Haste, and join her.

WALTER, (*with affected carelessness.*)

She does not need my escort: she has servants.

DAME MARGARET.

She has, and thou the chief. So after her.

[*Retires up the hall.*]

WALTER.

So far, at least, will I as to the air;
And try if that will cool my fevered blood,
And still to healthful calm my throbbing brain.

[Exit.

SCENE II.

Another apartment in the same. Enter LYNCH and GOMEZ.

LYNCH.

I must not keep thee longer from the friends
Who wait thee in the hall. And yet to part
With my dear Walter scarce could be more painful
Than is this parting with the son of him
Who, from the morning of my life, 'till now,
When evening's shades are gathering thick around me,
Has been even as a brother to my heart.
Age makes us wondrous selfish. Every good
That we may hold, as we approach the grave
Becomes each moment dearer, 'till our grasp
Is loosened only by the hand of death.
And though in justice I should render back
Unto my friend the youth entrusted to me,
To be companion to my boy, that in
Our children might their fathers' friendship live,
Thou'st been so long my son, I yield thee up
With deep reluctance. Yet it must be so!
And to the evil we cannot prevent

We should, at least, with seeming grace submit.
So now farewell! and with thee take the blessing
Of one whose heart, though chilled by age and cares,
For thine and thee hath cherished at its core
The love that warmed it in life's budding spring.

GOMEZ.

O, my dear lord, I know not how to thank thee
For all the kindness found beneath this roof,
To which I came a stranger, but depart
A son, at least, in love. I go; and with me
Bear that will summer to the winter be
Of my dear father's age. How will he joy
To hear of the success that has a life
Of virtue crowned;—making his early friend
The first in honour as the first in wealth;—
And blessed—O far beyond or wealth or honour!—
In every thing that makes a heaven of home!
But I must hasten, to fulfil a promise
To Agnes made, that I would see her father
Ere my departure, and that hour is near.
So, gracious lord, farewell!

LYNCH, (*embracing him.*)

Farewell, dear youth,
And may our Holy and Beneficent Mother
Make smooth for thee the passage of the deep!

[*Exit GOMEZ.*]

Enter DAME MARGARET.

Alone, my husband?

LYNCH.

Not alone, dear wife.

The man of active mind is ne'er alone,
For with him live the dead of buried ages,
And distant friends are ever present to him.
But now I'd other company than such
As the magician Thought can conjure up.
The youthful Gomez hath this moment left me.

DAME MARGARET.

Heaven speed him on his homeward way! How must
His mother long to fold him to her heart!

LYNCH.

And thinkest thou a father's heart may not,
Towards the object of its love, as fondly
Even as a mother's, yearn?

DAME MARGARET.

It may be so;

Yet it is hardly what we would expect
From man's rough nature. He may look with pride
Upon the son through whom, to after years,
His name and honours are to be transmitted,
As thou upon our Walter, who, his faults—
The faults of youth—the weeds that never spring
But from a generous soil—being now redeemed,

Will add new lustre to thine honoured name.
But were he sickly; of a feeble temper;
Unsightly to behold, would still thy love
Him clasp unto thine heart, 'till he had grown
To be the dearest portion of thyself?
Or would'st not rather cast the creature from thee,
In bitterness of soul, for being that
Which thou could'st take no pride in? for, believe me,
Pride's oft the spring of much that man calls Love.

LYNCH.

Well, as thou wilt;—thy sex's privilege;—
For 'tis a theme on which I cannot argue.
I only know I love our boy—as I
Have loved his mother—with my heart and soul.

DAME MARGARET.

Yet with a difference. Thou lovest me
For what I was;—but him for what he shall be.

LYNCH.

For what ye are;—the choicest blessings Heaven,
Throughout a long and prosperous life, hath given me;
And 'twere to be ungrateful to that Heaven,
For what it hath bestowed, to love you not.
But (*taking her hand to lead her out*) let us to our
 guests; and though the hour
Is wearing late, we still must urge their stay.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.

A street before the house of AGNES's father. Enter WALTER.

WALTER.

How soothing are thine influences, Night,
To the perturbed spirit. Thy sweet breath
Whispers of peace; and as thy holy dew
Fall on the burning brow, the wild disorder
Which filled the brain with images of horror,
Gives place to thoughts of love and confidence.
The blood that late, with hot and furious haste,
Rushed through these veins, now temperately moves,
As if no maddening draught e'er mingled with it;
And the hard pulse, so painfully that throbbed,
Is beating even as a sleeping babe's.
The pangs of Jealousy—the vulture that
With sharpest tooth was gnawing at my heart—
Vex me no more; and I have but one wish—
To see, and be to Agnes reconciled.

[Enter GOMEZ from the house, and passes hurriedly up the street.]

Ha! what is this? I hope the old man's illness
Hath not assumed a more alarming form,
And this a messenger sent out for aid.
I will accost him. By yon Heaven! 'tis Gomez!
What does he here at such an hour as this?
What errand can he have—but one? O traitor!

Smooth-browed and serpent-tongued! from thy false
heart

I'll draw the venomous flood that feeds thy life!

[Drawing his sword, and following.]

Ho, villain! turn, and meet what thou deservest.

[Exit after GOMEZ.]

GOMEZ, (*without.*)

What means this violence?

WALTER, (*without.*)

My sword shall answer.

[Clashing of swords without.]

*Re-enter GOMEZ, mortally wounded, who staggers down the street,
and after him WALTER.*

GOMEZ.

Whoe'er thou art, thy madness hath destroyed
The life of one that ne'er did wilful wrong
To living thing; yet Heaven forgive it thee!

[Falls and dies.]

WALTER, (*after a pause.*)

What have I done! Destroyed a life, so dear
That yesterday mine own I would have perilled
To save it from mischance! Sent unprepared—
Without a moment for one prayer for mercy—
A soul into the presence of its Judge!
And here I stand, beneath the calm blue heavens,
All crimsoned o'er with blood!

My brain is burning!

My heart is turned to ice! and aguish shiverings
Do shake my palsied limbs!

What forms are these,
That gather round and fright me with their glare?
Why do they point to that poor ghastly corse,
And clap their hands, and laugh exultingly?
O fiends are they, that from the realms of woe
Have come to triumph in my misery,
Before they drag me with them down th' abyss,
To share the doom of howling murderers!
Murderers! Who calls me *Murderer*? Who
Looked on, and saw my sword avenge the wrong
My heart had suffered from his treachery?
No eye beheld the deed,—but that of Him
Who knows how deep had been the provocation.
Then why should I before my fellow-men
Be branded as a murderer, when the sea,
Which almost to the spot whereon I stand
Rolls its eternal waves, hath depths wherein
The secret of my crime may hidden lie
Until the day when all shall be revealed?
Then to the sea will I this form commit;
And though Remorse tug ever at my heart,
Will dress my face to look like Innocence.

[*Takes up the body, and bears it off.*]

A C T I I.

SCENE.

A hall in the house of the Mayor. LYNCH discovered writing.
Enter ARTHUR, yawning.

ARTHUR.

Why, uncle mine, what villainous hours ye keep
In this unrighteous city. Scarce had I
Embraced my dearest friend, the couch, when roused
By clamours in the street, enow to wake
The sleepers of the grave. What mean those noises?

LYNCH, (*looking up.*)

Noises? What noises? I hear nothing, save
The ordinary sounds of city life,
Which, when thou art as used to them as I,
Thou wilt as little heed. Go sleep again.

[*Resumes his writing.*]

ARTHUR.

I do not mean the hawkers' dissonance,
Or heavy tramp of plodding citizens,
But mingled shrieks, and oaths, and lamentations,
And words that seemed to speak of murder.

LYNCH, (*rising and coming forward.*)

Murder?

No brawl I hope has brought disgrace upon
Our city. I must see to this.

TIRLOGH, (*entering hastily.*)

My lord!

LYNCH.

Well, what's the matter?

TIRLOGH.

O my lord! my lord!

The noble Gomez has been basely murdered!

LYNCH.

Great Heaven! But no. Thou hast not heard aright.

TIRLOGH.

O I would give mine ears to know mine ears
Had played me false. But they, alas! too truly
In this have done their office. He is murdered!
And the vile wretch who robbed him of his life,
The rifled casket—his poor body—cast
Into the sea, but which the sea, unwilling
So foul a deed to hide, returned to earth,
And by some sailors, who were hither coming
To hasten his departure from our shores,
Upon the beach at early morn was found.

LYNCH.

O Tirlogh, this is heavy news indeed!
A youth, of fairest promise, is cut off
In manhood's early bloom. A heart, wherein
All kindly virtues had their dwelling place,
Is turned to ashes. And—ah, heaviest woe!—

The love, that filled with light his distant home,
Is quenched in blood; and his poor, aged parents,
Must totter on in darkness to the grave
No filial hand shall deck. Alas, for them,
Even more than this poor victim, do I grieve!
But is there nought that to the murderer points?

TIRLOGH.

Nothing, my lord.

LYNCH.

And yet he shall be found.

[Voices without.]

What noise is that?

TIRLOGH.

They bring the body hither.

[Enter Spanish sailors bearing the body of GOMEZ, followed
by CAHIR, and citizens of both sexes.]

MEN, (as they enter.)

Woe, to our country, woe! In all the tears
That from her have been wrung, no drops of shame
'Till now e'er mingled. Gone, alas! for ever
The name she long hath borne among the nations—
Erin the Hospitable! Full of trust
The stranger came unto her shores, but, ah!
Instead of welcome, and the hand of friendship,
Received and fell beneath the murderer's knife.

WOMEN, (following.)

Alas. for the poor stranger! far from home,

And all he loved, to die alone!—unpitied!—
Without a sister's hand to smooth his pillow;—
A mother's voice to soothe his dying pangs!
Alas! alas! 'tis ever hard to die:—
But hardest is't to him who dies alone!

LYNCH, (*who has been for some time gazing on the body.*)

Alas, my friends! this is a piteous sight!
And one on which not even the passing stranger
Could look unmoved. How must it then afflict
One who, like me, hath known this youth for years;
Hath loved him as he would a second son;
And, after filling long a father's place,
Must now lament him with a father's grief!

CAHIR.

We all do know, my lord, how well you loved him;
And know we shall not call on you in vain
For speedy vengeance on his murderer.

LYNCH.

Doubt not that ye shall call in vain for JUSTICE,
For that is all, good friend, we should require,
And more it is than we may dare to meet.
But justice shall be done. I have an oath
Which binds me, on the peril of my soul,
To grant impartial justice to all men;—
And I have done so. And, what never yet
Have I withheld from any who did seek it,

I will not now deny, when the dear son
Of a dear friend calls for it from the dead.

CAHIR.

Justice or vengeance—call it what you will—
'Tis much the same. All that we ask of you,
Is that his murderer shall not go unpunished.

LYNCH.

That shall he not. The Law's decree is DEATH
To him who wilfully another's life
Shall take. And whosoe'er the murderer,
Were he the dearest friend I have on earth,
Nay, dearer even than that—mine only son,
I must and will obey the Law's behest.
But first the obsequies of this poor youth
Shall celebrated be with all observance;
While through the city, upon every altar,
The Holy Mass shall Heaven propitiate
For the immortal soul, that hath been thus
Untimely sent into God's awful presence.
But (*to Arthur*), where is Walter? Heavily this news
Will fall upon his heart, for as a brother
He loved this noble, but illfated, youth.
Go seek, and break it gently to him, nephew.

[*Exit ARTHUR.*]

But who, O Gomez, shall the tidings bear
Of thy disastrous end to thy poor parents!
Whose eager gaze is bent towards our shores,

While fancy makes of every wave, that lifts
Its snowy crest above the dark green sea,
The ship that to their longing arms shall bring
The treasure they had given unto my keeping,
Nor dream how fearfully their trust has failed.

ARTHUR, (*re-entering in alarm.*)

He is not in his room. His bed looks not
As through the night it had been occupied.
He may have gone with Gomez to his boat.
Pray Heaven he hath not been as foully dealt with!

LYNCH.

Not in his bed? What horrors crowd my brain!
Fly! Let the household be alarmed!

WALTER, (*entering.*)

No need.

Walter is here. The wretched, blood-stained Walter!

[TIRLOGH hurries to him.]

LYNCH.

What is the meaning of those dreadful words?
With what blood art thou stained?

WALTER.

The blood of Gomez.

LYNCH, (*in a low voice.*)

Have mercy, Heaven!—let not the thing I fear
Become reality, and crush me utterly!

TIRLOGH, (*to Walter.*)

Restrain thy tongue! Dost thou not see all eyes
'Are on thee bent in wonder or in anger?

WALTER, (*to Tirlogh.*)

I heed them not. My gaze is inward turned,
And there I see a soul defiled with blood!

TIRLOGH, (*to Walter.*)

O, for the love of Heaven! restrain thy tongue.

LYNCH.

Come hither, Walter. Let me understand
What thou dost mean. Thou and thy friend did quarrel.
Ye fought;—and thou didst slay him. Was it so?

WALTER.

We had no quarrel.

LYNCH, (*eagerly.*)

And thou didst not slay him?
O Walter! say to me thou didst not slay him.

WALTER.

Father, I slew him.

LYNCH.

Pray for me, ye saints,
That I my manhood lose not, nor my reason!
Yet 'twas not by design?

WALTER.

O would to Heaven

That, as thou wishest, I could say it was not!
But in a fit of momentary madness—

TIRLOGH.

Ay, madness;—and the fit is on him still.

LYNCH, (*joyfully.*)

I knew, I knew thou didst not—couldst not mean it!

WALTER.

Alas, I cannot leave thee even the comfort—
Poor as it is—of that belief. But hear me,
Father; and ye, who in amazement stand,
Hear also, that, should love of life hereafter
Lead me to palliate my dire offence,
Ye may be able to convict of falsehood
My coward tongue. I slew him. Not by chance,
But with deliberate purpose. Ye all know
How I did love him. Even as I loved,
So did I trust him;—and he did deceive me.
Deceived, and wronged me there where all men feel
The wrong most keenly;—wronged me in mine honour.
Beneath the cover of the night, I saw
The traitor stealing from the house of her
Whose faith to me was plighted. Stung to madness—
By proof of my disgrace—I rushed upon,
And slew him.

ARTHUR.

He deserved the fate he met.

LYNCH.

O teach me patience, all-enduring Heaven !

WALTER.

Then smote upon my heart the sense of guilt ;
And loud within my breast a voice cried out
In condemnation of the deed, which even
My bitter wrongs refused to justify.
And straight I fled, as if upon my steps
Followed th' avenger of a brother's blood,
And hid myself within a forest deep.
But, though I felt secure from all pursuit,
I could not rest ; and from my hiding-place
Came forth, with purpose to demand from justice
A murderer's reward.

LYNCH.

O wretched boy !

He thou didst slay was never more thy friend
Than when thou deem'dst him false. The visit made
Was not to Agnes—but her suffering father.

WALTER.

O do not drive me mad ! Do not deprive me
Of the dear thought—that my revenge was just !

LYNCH.

Thy cruel rage was wholly without cause.
His visit and its object both I knew.

WALTER, (*throwing himself by the side of the body.*)
O murdered, murdered friend!

[*Starting up and drawing his sword.*

But I will join thee!

LYNCH, (*wresting the sword from him.*)
And do a double murder? Be a man,
And bear the penalty thy crime has dared.
And, though it reach thy life, it cannot fall
With half the weight on thee that 'twill on me!

WALTER.

My father!

LYNCH, (*to an attendant.*)

Call me here the officers.

[*Exit attendant.*

TIRLOGH, (*throwing himself on his knees before LYNCH.*)
My lord, my lord! O think before you act!
Let not stern Justice drown the voice of Nature.
He hath done wrong;—he owns it;—and repents it.
And than repentance who can more demand?
He is your son—your *only* son; the sole
Remaining prop of a time-honoured house.
Then do not give him over to the Law—
The cruel Law, that nothing knows of mercy,
But treats the being hurried into crime
By fierce, impetuous passion, and the wretch
Grown gray in wickedness, with like severity.
O save him then, my lord, and save yourself

From woe unutterable!

[Enter attendant with officers.]

LYNCH.

Tirlogh, rise.

[He rises.]

My duty is most plain, however painful,

And cannot be avoided. *(To the officers.)* To your
charge

Do I commit this youth. Stand not amazed.

He is your prisoner.

[Enter DAME MARGARET, and hurries up to WALTER.]

DAME MARGARET.

What's this I hear?

They tell me Gomez hath been basely murdered;—

But sure that could not be and thou be near?

CAHIR.

Perhaps he was too near.

DAME MARGARET.

What means the knave?

CAHIR.

No knave, good lady, but an honest man,

Who speaks even as he thinks.

TIRLOGH, *(to Cahir.)*

Wilt hold thy peace,

Before I cut thy tongue out, yelping cur?

CAHIR.

Why, at thy bidding, should I hold my peace,

Who am as good a father's son as thou.
As good? Ay, better. 'Neath this ragged vest
Is purer blood than ever warmed thy heart,
For all thy gay apparel—thy daw's feathers—
Another's lendings.

DAME MARGARET, (*not heeding him.*)

How is this, my son?

All eyes are turned on thee, and thine alone
Are bent upon the earth. What does this mean?
Art thou with grief so overcome as not
To hear thy mother's question?

[*Turning to LYNCH.*

Tell me husband—

[*Officers place themselves on either side of WALTER, who is
about to accompany them, when she rushes before them.*]

O, no! no! no! ye shall not take him from me!
Will no one say with what this youth is charged?

CAHIR.

The murder of young Gomez.

DAME MARGARET.

What base tongue
Would couple *murderer* with the name of LYNCH?

CAHIR.

Even the tongue of your own son, my lady.

DAME MARGARET.

I charge thee, Walter, by the love thou ow'st me,
To say to me, they do accuse thee falsely.

WALTER.

Dear mother ! blame not any for the strait
Wherein I'm placed—I am mine own accuser.

DAME MARGARET.

O he is mad ! Do ye not see he's mad ?
This sudden and most terrible affliction
His reason has unseated ! Had it not,
Would he, the kindest, the most merciful
Of living beings, who would injure not
The meanest of God's creatures, charge himself—
O monstrous charge !—of lifting up his hand
Against the friend that most he loved on earth ?
O Heaven ! it is not to be credited !
Why (*to Lynch*) stand'st thou there, like image cut in
stone,
Cold, and immovable, when on thy house
Destruction comes in its most dreadful form ?

LYNCH.

Even as Heaven wills. If I must bear the brand
Upon this furrowed brow, for wrongs I ne'er
Have even in thought committed—be it so !
The dust will cover soon my shame and me.
And when I'm dead, I shall not of my blood
Leave one behind to whom my memory
Can bring a blush. The cold, unlovely grave
Will be more welcome than the bed of down

To one despised and childless! Walter! Walter!

WALTER, (*throwing himself on his knees.*)

O pardon, pardon! that upon thy head,
Grown gray in honour, my rash deed hath brought
Unmerited disgrace.

LYNCH, (*raising him.*)

Kneel not to me.

The shadow, that must fall upon my name,
Will pass away—as all things earthly pass—
And even the name shall cease to be remembered
In honour or reproach. But kneel to Him,
Whom thou hast outraged by thine impious act,—
Thy rude defacement of His noble image,—
And humbly pray the waters of His mercy
To cleanse the blood-stains from thy guilty soul.
Now, officers, your duty. Take him hence.

DAME MARGARET, (*throwing herself upon the neck of*

WALTER.)

Yet, yet a moment. Whether true or false
The charge ye urge against him—I know not.
But this I know;—he is my child; and ne'er
In helpless infancy, when in these arms
His form was cradled, and upon this bosom
His head was pillowed, did he need the love
That o'er him watched as much as now he needs it:
And he shall have it. We will go together.

WALTER.

Nay, dearest mother! As alone I sinned,
Even so must I alone by suffering
Seek pardon for the crime I have committed.
Release me, then, and go thou with my father.

DAME MARGARET.

And leave thee to the horrors of a prison?—
Without one friendly voice to cheer the gloom?—
One sympathizing heart to rest upon?—
And thou cast off by all the world beside?
Indeed, indeed I cannot!

WALTER.

Be advised,
I pray, dear mother. Let me now obey
The Law's demand unhindered. 'Twill be best.

DAME MARGARET.

Where all is evil there can be no best.

LYNCH, (*disengaging her from WALTER.*)

In all the years that we have passed together,
I ne'er have had to claim a husband's right
To thy obedience. Must I do so now?

DAME MARGARET, (*going with him.*)

No, dearest husband;—but my son, my son!

WALTER, (*as his father turns away.*)

But bless me, wilt thou not? before I go!

LYNCH, (*returning and embracing him.*)

O from this breaking heart, I say—God bless thee!

[*As they stand in the centre of the hall, with the officers behind them, DAME MARGARET, supported by TIRLOGH, on one side, and the bier, surrounded by sailors and citizens, on the other, the Act ends.*]

A C T I I I .

SCENE I.

Interior of the Church of St. Nicholas, the high altar of which is covered with black and lighted. Before the altar the coffin of GOMEZ, on which candles are burning. LYNCH, in his robes of office, is discovered kneeling at the foot of the coffin. He rises and comes forward.

LYNCH.

O could I put this bitter chalice by,
How gladly would I change my proud estate
For poverty, and toil, and banishment
Eternal from the blessed light of day,
And the sweet air, of which the meanest thing
That God hath formed is free. There is no depth
Of human degradation I would not
With cheerfulness explore, could I but take
With me the holy bond of love unbroken.
O Heaven! what crime unknown have I committed,
That for atonement thou of me demandest
A sacrifice so terrible? My life—
Would but my life suffice—most cheerfully
It should be offered up in expiation.
Then teach me, O some minister of good!
How I may save my son yet keep my oath.
My oath? What is that oath? A word!—a breath!
And shall a thing so weak possess the power

To wring the life of life from out our hearts,
And make these forms our beings' sepulchres?
Alas! how weak a thing am I become!
That I should strive, with sophistries like these,
To cheat my conscience to my soul's undoing?
Deliberate was my oath, inviolate
The Law t' administer. That oath is writ
Against me in the registry of Heaven,
In characters as Heaven endurable,
And, though my heart-strings shrivel in the fire
Of the ordeal, must be kept. O Thou!
Who mid his tortures nerv'st the martyr's heart,
Now aid me with Thy strength to do my duty.

[*Exit.*

Enter ARTHUR and TIRLOGH.

TIRLOGH.

A melancholy errand brings us here!

ARTHUR.

It is, indeed, a melancholy errand!
Ah, Tirloagh, not in haste shall we forget
Our first sad meeting in this holy place.
O I am sick at heart, in grieving o'er
The woe unparalleled now fallen upon us.
A few short hours have done the work of years.
My youth seems gone, and all the weariness
Of age hath settled, like a blighting frost,
Upon my spirit. We have come to pray

Beside the corse of Gomez, yet, so full
Of his unhappy murderer are my thoughts,
I cannot frame a prayer for the departed.

TIRLOGH.

I grieve indeed for both; yet not like those
Who hopeless grieve. I have no fears for Walter.

ARTHUR.

Thou know'st his father is inflexible.

TIRLOGH.

He is accounted so. But ne'er till now
Hath his inflexibility been tested.
I've heard of rocks of ice, that seemed as hard
As adamant, yet were not proof 'gainst fire.
O sir, we'll see how soon this heart thou deem'st
Inflexible will yield.

ARTHUR.

Pray Heaven it may.

[*Organ sounds.*]

But hush; that sound preludes the holy rites.
Then let us from our thoughts dismiss the living—
No easy task—and think but of the dead.

[*They retire up towards the altar, as monks and others enter
in procession, and arrange themselves on either side of
the coffin.*]

REQUIEM.—MONKS.

A weak and erring child of dust,
To whom his Master did entrust

A jewel of excelling worth,
Has passed to his account from earth.

A weary path has man to tread,
And round him are temptations spread,
And oft, alas! his strength will fail,
Or pleasure's blandishments prevail.

Then if he slept when he should wake,
And let the foe his treasure take,
Or if neglect its lustre dim,
Pity, dear Lord! and pardon him.

[Scene closes.

SCENE II.

A chamber in the house of LYNCH. Enter AGNES dejectedly, and stops before a picture of the MATER DOLOROSA.

HYMN.—AGNES.

Sweet Mother! through whose tender breast,
The sword of grief hath passed,
O from thy place of blissful rest
An eye of pity cast!
Thou seest a maid whose heart is torn
By sharpest misery,
Then think of all which thine has borne,
And, Mother, pity me!

All hope of earthly aid is gone!
And I to none can turn,
If thou, O Queen of Heaven's bright throne,
Thy lowly suppliant spurn.

Then MOTHER!—by that tender name
By Him was given to thee
For love of man from Heaven who came,—
O MOTHER! pity me!

Enter DAME MARGARET.

DAME MARGARET.

Dear child, I grieve to find thee so desponding.
But take not counsel of thy fears—but hopes.
What though the night be dark? the morn will come
When all its darkness shall be turned to light.

AGNES.

Ah, madam, little cause have we for hope;
And thou but yesternight did'st hopeless seem.
What since hath happ'd to change thy tears to smiles?

DAME MARGARET.

An angel have I seen—in Tirlogh's form;—
Tirlogh, the well-tried friend of our poor Walter;—
Who bade me not despair. And thus he reasoned:
His father is his judge;—then he is safe.
For could a father's heart the thought conceive,
Or father's tongue give utterance to the thought,
That, howsoe'er deserved, his son should die
A felon's death? He may condemn the crime—
And who does not?—yet spare the criminal
He can and will. Nay, must. Indeed he must.
For if his own strong love should not compel him—
But that it will who doubts?—to step between

The Law and him who has transgressed the Law,
The universal sentiment of love,
Which makes the child the parent's dearest care—
The feeling common to the meanest hind
As to the proudest noble—would raise up
A wall of hearts to bar him from his purpose,
If that were death to him he should protect;—
The true, the earnest, the right-judging people
Rise in their might, and from the altar tear
The victim he to an unholy Law
Would immolate. O no, he will not die!

AGNES.

O blessings on him! he has from my heart
A burthen raised that weighed it to the earth.
But is't not dreadful here to wait inactive
Until some leaden-footed messenger
Shall bring us tidings he is guiltless found?

DAME MARGARET.

And wherefore wait that tardy messenger,
When we are free to go into the court,
And catch the blessed words of pardon from
The judge's lips, before the gaping crowd
Shall turn them into meaning? I have dresses
Will so disguise us, that our nearest friends
Would know us not.

AGNES.

Dear madam, this is kind.

DAME MARGARET.

But, look well, Agnes, into thy heart's depths,
And see if any weakness there be lurking
Will render thee unable to perform
The task we have before us. If there be,
Leave not thy chamber. I can go alone.
The love that fills the bosom of a mother
Would, to the feeblest of our sex, give strength
To bear worse evils, than to stand alone
Amid a jostling crowd.

AGNES.

Fear not for me.
Let me but stand where I may gaze upon him;
May catch the murmured music of his voice,
Or only breathe the blessed air he breathes,
And I will nerve me to endure the worst
That can befall. O how I long to be
The first to cry from out the multitude,
"Walter! art safe!—art free!"

DAME MARGARET.

But should his doom
Be death?

AGNES, (*shuddering, and covering her face.*)

O Heaven! But no;—it cannot be!

DAME MARGARET.

Nay, be not frightened, girl;—it *shall* not be,

While lives of the bold race of which I come
A man to guard the honour of our house.
Die like a felon? Thinkest thou the Blakes
Would from their Castle of the Hills look down,
And see an act committed at their feet
That must for ever brand them with disgrace,
Nor yet stretch forth a hand to save their kinsman?
O no. There is not one, from chief to kern,
Who, should his father's reverence for his oath
The voice of nature stifle in his breast,
Would not make common cause with me, to save
A life in which both mine and thine are bound.
But let us haste, that we may meet the joy
Would be too long in coming.

AGNES.

O most gladly.

[*Excunt.*

SCENE III.

A street. Enter MIHIL.

MIHIL.

Ah, well! of all the sights I've ever seen—
And these old eyes have witnessed many sad ones—
I ne'er saw one so piteous as this!
A father sitting in the Judgment Seat,
At which his only son stands charged with murder—

And if the charge be proved—as proved it must be—
That father's lips—the thought doth freeze my blood!—
Must pass upon his son the doom of death.
How my heart aches for them!

Enter CAHIR.

CAHIR.

Whence com'st thou, neighbour?

MIHIL.

From witnessing the trial.

CAHIR.

Well, how goes it?

Is it thy thought they'll prove this ruffler guilty
Of any thing will put his neck in danger?

MIHIL.

Alas, I fear they will.

CAHIR.

Why should'st thou *fear* it?

MIHIL.

Because I loved this youth,—as who did not?—
The kindest heart and freest hand in Galway,
Which even thou wilt not deny—and if
The crime be proved—the penalty must follow.

CAHIR.

Thou mean'st it would—were he thy son or mine.
But, being whose he is, 'twere very strange

If something be not found in the indictment,
Or the proceedings of the court—unless
They plead at once insanity—to warrant
Postponement of the judgment for a term.
And, in the interim, what is to hinder
The youth—by the remissness of his gaolers,
Who need not fear too rigid scrutiny
Into their acts—beyond the sea t' escape?
When, as thou know'st, the citizens stand ready,
As soon as Tirlogh shall the signal give,
To aid him in his flight.

MIHIL.

And so do I,
And so would every man who hath a heart
To feel for human misery. And what misery
Like this which threatens the noble-hearted Lynch—
To doom away the life of his own child?

CAHIR.

'Tis something of a trial, I admit.

MIHIL.

O hadst thou seen him as this morn I saw him,
Kneeling within the chapel of St. Bhried,
Thou must have wished to spare all further trial
Of one so sorely tried. Before the altar
He knelt—or, rather, crouched,—and on his breast
His hands were folded tight, as if to still

The throbbings of his heart, while his thin locks,
Grown sudden white, around his temples hung
In wild disorder. Up his face was turned ;—
I ne'er saw living face so like the dead's,
Save there was not the calm that marks the dead's ;—
And from his brow the sweat in heavy drops
Fell down. He looked like one bereft of all
That earth can give, and asking help from Heaven.

CAHIR.

I have no quarrel with this Lynch Fitzstephen ;
And, though I had no wish to see him such,
Must say most ably hath he filled the office
Of our chief magistrate ; and 'tis not therefore
From any personal feeling in the matter,
That I declare, I have but little faith
In his ability—mark, not his *will*,
But his *ability*—to give a judgment,
Whate'er the proofs against the criminal,
Must make his old age childless.

MIHIL.

Ah, my friend,
Thou little know'st the man of whom we speak,
To judge him thus. Let him but know his duty,
And from it he'll not shrink, cost what it may.

CAHIR.

Bah ! I at least know human nature, Mihil,

If him I know not, who I think is *Man*.
But go thy ways, while I will to the court,
And see how well my prophecy's fulfilled.

[*Exit.*

MIHIL, (*looking after him.*)

Thy hope is that it may be falsified.
And never did I pray for disappointment
To wish of man as now I pray for thine.

[*Exit in an opposite direction.*

SCENE IV.

The court. LYNCH in the Judgment Seat. WALTER, with ARTHUR on one side and TIRLOGH on the other, stands in the prisoner's place. Spectators fill the lower part of the hall, among whom are DAME MARGARET and AGNES, disguised.

AGNES, (*aside, and looking at WALTER.*)

How wretched are his looks! His manly form:
Hath lost its noble bearing! On his brow
Is writ the anguish of a wounded spirit!
His cheek is pale, and sunken; and his eye—
From which the soul of honour once looked forth
So proudly—turns its gaze upon the earth,
As if he feared to meet the face of man!
O crime! this is thy work!

DAME MARGARET, (*aside.*)

My son! my husband!

I cannot look upon them, the hot tears
So gall mine eyes and blind me. O, sweet Heaven,
Have pity on them, and support them both.

LYNCH.

Prisoner, stand forth.

[WALTER *advances to the centre.*

Thou'st heard the testimony
That doth convict thee of a grievous crime—
A crime alike by God and man abhorred—
And which the unhappy perpetrator places
Beyond the pale of social fellowship,
And dooms him to an ignominious death.

[*Sinks back.*

A SPECTATOR.

Look to the Mayor ;—he faints !

LYNCH, (*rousing himself with an effort, and waving back
those who press forward to assist him.*)

If thou hast any thing to offer in
Extenuation of thy dire offence,
Or why the sentence of the Law should not
Against thee be pronounced, now be it said.

WALTER.

Nothing have I to offer. I already
My crime have published ; and to what I then
Confessed I do adhere. And though from Heaven
I may forgiveness hope of my dread sin,

Which, with compunction lasting as my life,
And with unceasing tears, I shall bewail,
I cannot from the laws that I have outraged
Expect aught else but death: and, to the fate
Which I have merited, I do submit
Without a murmur. Let me know my doom.

LYNCH.

Then learn it from the lips that laid the first
Fond kiss of welcome on thine infant brow,
And uttered the first words of thanks to Heaven
That to mine ancient house an heir was born.

[Pauses greatly affected.]

Hear, Walter Lynch, the sentence of the Court.
'Tis this. Thou to the prison must return
From which thou camest; whence, on this day month,
Before the hour of prime, thou shalt be taken
Unto the usual place of execution,
And by the neck be hanged 'till thou art dead!
And O may God have mercy on thy soul!

[Falls back senseless.]

TIRLOGH.

O Heaven! this is murder, and not justice.

WALTER, *(to Tirlogh.)*

If thou hast ever loved me, speak not now.

LYNCH, *(slowly recovering.)*

Remove the prisoner.

AGNES, (*rushing forward as the officers approach, and throwing her arms around* WALTER.)

Off! and touch him not!

Or, if ye will take him, why take me too.
One dungeon shall receive us, and one grave,
Whence we together will ascend to Heaven.

WALTER.

This is beyond the bitterness of death!
O Agnes, thy unchanging love and truth,
To him whose crime was first a doubt of thee,
Is the severest torture. I was not
For this prepared. (*To officers.*) In pity take me hence!

AGNES, (*clinging to him.*)

They shall not part us.

DAME MARGARET, (*interfering.*)

In an hour like this,
O wilful maiden! is it for a mother
To teach thee patience? Look, is this a place,
Beneath the vulgar and irreverent gaze,
To show a thing so sacred as the love
That should be shrined within a woman's breast?
All efforts here are impotent to stay
The course of those who serve the Law, and what
We cannot do that should we ne'er essay.
Come thou with me.

WALTER.

Dear Agnes, leave me now.
And, mother, let her henceforth be to thee
What I, alas! must be no more—thy child!

DAME MARGARET.

My child she is, and shares my heart with thee.
But only shares, for none can take thy place.
Farewell, my son. Droop not. The worst is passed.
The Judge hath spoke—the Father now must act.
[Exit leading out AGNES.]

WALTER.

What does she mean? Can there be chance of pardon?
An hour ago, I thought my heart was dead
To every hope that appertained to life;
But now, that I have seen my love once more,
I feel, though ever in my cup of joy
Must crime infuse its bitterness, I would
Still willingly drag on the chain of life,
While Agnes shrank not from me. (*To officers.*) I
attend you.

LYNCH, (*descending from his seat, with the assistance of*
ARTHUR and TIRLOGH.)

A moment stay.

WALTER, (*aside.*)

What trial now awaits me?

LYNCH, (*breaking from those who attend him, and falling on his knees before* WALTER.)

Walter, my son, forgive thy wretched father!

WALTER, (*attempting to raise him.*)

My father! O forgive thy guilty son!

[LYNCH rises to his feet. They embrace. WALTER is led out, and LYNCH, staggering back, is caught by ARTHUR.]

A C T I V.

SCENE I.

A room in the house of LYNCH. Enter LYNCH followed by TIRLOGH.

LYNCH.

No more, Tirlogh, no more ;—I will not hear thee.
Think'st thou I've shut my heart to others' prayers
To open it to thine? Be disabused.

TIRLOGH.

I plead no more. But now, Lord Mayor of Galway,
I do demand fulfilment of a promise.

LYNCH.

To that I'll listen. Give thy meaning words.

TIRLOGH.

Twelve years ago, when sporting in the bay
With your unhappy son, a sudden tempest
Upset our shallow skiff, and plunged us both
Amid the boiling waves, that foamed and roared
To drown our cries for aid, had there been hope
That any such could reach us from the land.
It was not the first time that with the waters
I had contended, and I rose above them.
But Walter was less fortunate, and sank,
As to my fear it seemed, to rise no more.

That fear gave strength to my exhausted frame
I dived, and grasped him by his matted locks,
By which I dragged him upward to the day,
Despite the violence of warring billows,
And was, as then I thought, the blessed means
Of giving him unto a father's arms.

LYNCH.

O I remember, as 'twere yesterday,
My agony, when I beheld the peril
Of my poor boy, and the delirious joy
With which I clasped him to my heart, that swelled
With thankfulness—not more to Heaven than thee!

TIRLOGH.

You bade me then to ask whate'er I would,
And promised solemnly it should be granted.

LYNCH.

I do remember I so promised thee,
And ready stand to make my promise good;
But marvel that so long thou did'st delay
To ask for its fulfilment.

TIRLOGH.

Good my lord,
'Till now I nothing needed. By your bounty,
Had I been from a low condition raised,
To be companion to my foster-brother,
And was in all things treated as your son.

LYNCH.

And art thou not so still ?

TIRLOGH.

Alas, far better !

For he ——

LYNCH, (*sternly.*)

Forbear ! but name what thou would'st have.

TIRLOGH.

I stand alone. My father's aged limbs
Rest in the grave. My mother's heart is dust,
And cannot feel for aught shall me befall ;
And never yet hath pulse of maiden's breast
Been quickened at the thought of me. The Law—
That thirsty is for blood—demands a victim.
Be mine the life that shall be offered to it ;—
And give me, in fulfilment of your promise,
The freedom of your son.

LYNCH.

This—this is cruel !

Thou seest me bound and helpless at the stake,
O kill me then, but do not torture me !

TIRLOGH.

Think of your word.

LYNCH.

I think but of my OATH,

And every other thought is lost in that.
Go, go, and let me hear no more of this.

TIRLOGH, (*going.*)

You are obeyed, my lord. But when again
I come, it will not as a suppliant be,
But backed by arguments that shall require
More than a simple Yes or No to answer.

[*Exit.*]

LYNCH.

What! does he threaten? Well, it matters not.
His threats are harmless. Less I fear all foes
Without than one I carry in my bosom.

[*After a pause.*]

O it is terrible! I dare not look
Upon the desolation round me spread!
A winter, that no spring shall ever know,
Covers the earth: and o'er the heavens is cast
A thick, impenetrable pall. And this,
They tell me, is my work. That, for my pride,
A curse hath fallen on all goodly things,
And blasted them. And cold, reproachful looks,
And bitter words, are all that greet me now,
Turn where I will. O can they think this deed
Is one I would have chosen to perform,
That they upbraid me thus, when they must know
The stern necessity that forced my tongue
To utter what was death to mine own heart?

For he was all to me!—my thoughts' sole centre!—
The life-pulse of my being! Walter! Walter!

[Covers his face with his hands, and walks distractedly up and down.]

Enter ARTHUR.

Welcome, dear Arthur. Thou of all my friends,
Alone dost wear to me a brow unchanged,
And speaketh in the tone of other days.
I know thou lov'st thy cousin; and I thank thee,
That, in thy love for him, thou'st not forgotten
The pity due his father. 'Tis most foul,
The wrong my friends have done me in this matter.
For could I with my life redeem my son's
Most cheerfully the ransom should be paid.

ARTHUR.

Who knows thee cannot doubt it. But, dear uncle,
Why wilt thou doom thyself, and all who love thee,
To misery unnamable for nought?

LYNCH.

For nought? I have an oath I dare not break.
Is't that thou callest nought?

ARTHUR.

I call an oath
That's rashly taken—not being understood—
Such as the Church most wisely doth condemn—
Nothing;—or something it were far less sin
To break than keep. If thou hadst sworn to rob,

Or murder, art thou bound to keep that oath?

LYNCH.

No oath unlawful can the conscience bind ;
And he who swears he will cominit a crime,
Sins by his oath, but doubly if he keep it.

ARTHUR.

Canst thou, believing thus, still plead thy oath
To justify a murder?

LYNCH.

MURDER, Arthur?

My oath is to maintain the laws, and they
The punishment of death award to murder.

ARTHUR.

I know the laws that have come down to us,
From times remote and barbarous ancestors—
Unnatural, bloody, and unchristian laws—
Have given to man a power which God alone
Should exercise—the power of taking life.
But, whatsoe'er the sanction of the laws,
'Till he can breathe a soul into the clod,
Or raise again, when crumbled into dust,
The glorious temple of God's holy spirit,
Let him not impiously dare to wield
The power of the Almighty, lest the blood
Shed by his hand—unhidden by the earth—
Rise up to Heaven, and cry aloud for vengeance!

LYNCH.

Dear Arthur, when the office I now hold
Was tendered to me, I accepted it
With a full knowledge of the laws thou speak'st of.
And, with this knowledge, by a solemn oath
I bound myself t' administer the laws
Even as I found them. I have no excuse.
Yet have I tried all arguments—in vain—
To satisfy my conscience, that I might
Yield to the yearnings of a loving nature,
And, saving from the dark, insatiate grave
Young manhood, raise up to the sun again
That storm-crushed flower, sweet Agnes,
And from the spirit of a doting mother
Remove the grief that bows it to the dust.
But O it cannot be! My Oath! My Oath!
Where'er I turn my gaze—to earth or heaven—
I see it writ in characters of fire:—
The shrieking winds and moaning waves repeat it;—
And when the solemn Night casts o'er the earth
Her broad protecting wings, unearthly voices
Sleep from my pillow scare by shrilly crying,
“Thine Oath! Thine Oath!” O Arthur, pity me!
My soul recoils with horror from the deed
My conscience clamours for; and my weak brain
Grows dizzy, as I contemplate the abyss
That yawns before me! Heaven! I shall go mad!

Enter AGNES.

LYNCH, (*with an effort at composure.*)

Poor child! how does it fare with thee?

AGNES.

Alas!

How else than ill can it with any fare

Deprived, as I, of hope—the life of life?

O take not from me all!—Yet leave me hope.

LYNCH.

Alas, here is no Hope! she's fled to Heaven.

AGNES.

'Twas thou didst fright her hence; and at a word
Canst lure her from her refuge back to earth.

Bid Walter live, and she will quick return.

Come, Arthur, kneel with me, and pray this stern,
Unnatural parent but to spare himself.

ARTHUR.

O I would wear the pavement with my knees,

In praying for the life of him we love,

Did I not know the heart thou seek'st to move

Is harder than the stones we tread upon.

LYNCH.

Pity me, Heaven! all earth is turned against me!

O Arthur, this from thee!

AGNES.

Nay, he will yield.

Come, kneel. (*They kneel.*) O look upon us. We do ask
Nothing, but that thou wilt be merciful
Unto thyself. Think of the present grief;
The blighted name;—the black and desolate future,
Thy deed must work, and spare, O spare thy son!

LYNCH.

'Thou liftest up thy voice against the wind.
I cannot hear:—Mine oath has made me deaf.

AGNES.

A wicked oath is that which shuts the heart
Against the voice of Nature! O for pity,
Pluck not with ruthless hand the love away
That with my life is twined!

LYNCH.

Girl! do not talk
Of thy young love to me;—a summer flower
That lives but in the sun, and shrinks and dies
If the cold wind breathe on it. Have not I,
Obedient to a stern, relentless duty,
Torn up a love whose roots were in my heart!—
Yea, knit with every fibre of my being!—
And cast it from me, even though life went with it!
And thinkest thy weak voice can change a purpose
All other pleadings hath resisted? Rise!

Enter DAME MARGARET.

Nay, rise not yet, 'till I have joined my prayers

With yours, in pleadings to this obdurate man.
(*Kneels.*) My lord! My husband! Father of my son!
Wilt thou not list to her whose lightest word
'Till now, as thou hast said, was law to thee?

LYNCH.

O do not mock me with this show of reverence,
My own, true wife! and, pray thee, do not ask
Of thy poor husband what he must deny,
But rise unto thy proper place—my heart.

DAME MARGARET.

No, I will kneel until my knees shall grow
Unto the earth, if sooner thou dost yield not.
O by our early love;—our wedded bliss;—
The hopes and fears we shared for one dear object,
My husband, list to me!

LYNCH.

I dare not hear thee!

DAME MARGARET.

I pray thee, by a mother's pangs—

LYNCH.

O woman!

Why prat'st thou of a mother's pangs to me,
When, to the agonies that I have borne—
And bear—thy mother's pangs were thrills of joy!
Up, up, I say. I cannot, will not hear thee.

DAME MARGARET, (*rising, and followed by ARTHUR and AGNES.*)

I rise. But mark me, hard, remorseless man !
Though I must cease to plead, I shall not cease
To use a woman's efforts from thy grasp
To rescue him thy pride would doom to perish.
For I have friends, strong both in will and means,
Who will not stand and see a mother wronged ;
And he, whose blood thou wantonly would'st shed,
Shall live, and thy poor malice laugh to scorn.
Come with me, children ; we will go where mercy
Shall not be sought in vain.

[*Exit with AGNES and ARTHUR.*

LYNCH.

Gone ! gone ! all gone !

And I am left alone to meet the hour
That fond and clinging hearts shall tear asunder.
O Infinite Justice ! aid me with thy strength
To bear the heavy cross thou lay'st upon me.
The human love, on which I leant securely,
Hath broken in my grasp and wounded me
Most deeply. Hope of earthly aid is none ;
And my sad soul, tossed like a shattered bark
Upon a starless ocean, must sink down
Among the floods that threaten to o'erwhelm it,
Unless upborne by thy sustaining hand.
Save me, O save me ! from the fearful sin

To which I am most sorely tempted now,
By subtle fiends, that borrow for their purpose
The voices of our holiest affections !

[*Exit.*]

SCENE II.

A hall in the house of LYNCH. Enter BLAKE OF THE HILLS and DAME MARGARET, with AGNES and ARTHUR, from opposite doors.

DAME MARGARET.

Dear brother, welcome ! I was now about
To seek thee in thy Castle of the Hills,
To beg of thee—no, no, not *beg*—demand
That thou wilt save the honour of our race.

BLAKE.

That will I with my life, if thou wilt show me
In what it is imperilled.

DAME MARGARET.

Know'st thou not
My son—thy nephew—he who bears the name
Of our most noble father—now in prison
Lies under sentence of a shameful death ?
That there is scarce the space of twelve short hours
Between him and the scaffold ? That the sun,
Which shall to-morrow gladden all the earth,
Will shine upon his blackened corse, unless

Thou stretchest forth thy hand to snatch him from
The executioner ? Then save him, brother !
Save our pure blood from foul contamination ;—
And me, thy sister save from death—or madness !

BLAKE.

I knew thy husband, like some man of old,
Of whom I once heard tell, from one who had
Lost precious hours in poring over books—
Which, thank the blessed saints ! I never have—
Had on his son pronounced the doom of death ;
But did not dream that he would be so mad
As push the Law to its extremity :
Nor yet can I believe 'tis his intent.

ARTHUR.

Ah, father, thou but little know'st the man,
To doubt his purpose when he gives it words.
That which he says—he'll do.

BLAKE.

Dost think so, boy ?

We'll see ; we'll see. Of me thou something know'st ;
And know'st, I think, I never yet have yielded
My resolution to another man's.
If Lynch Fitzstephen were resolved to hang
All of his name, if in their veins my blood
Flowed not with his, I'd say, " With all my heart !
The world has done, and yet may do without them."

But he should first have asked, before he gave
His purpose breath, to hang my nephew, whether
I would thereto consent. He has not done so :
And I have come to tell him to his teeth,
That, in despite of Law ;—its myrmidons ;—
And the whole tribe of smooth-tongued hypocrites,
Who seek by holy means unholy ends,
And clothe Corruption in the garb of Justice ;—
My nephew shall not die.

DAME MARGARET.

There spake the son
Of my brave father !

AGNES.

Heaven's blessing on thee !

BLAKE.

Nor did I come alone to tell him this.
For I have left without the city those
Who, at the raising of my hand, would burst
His victim's prison doors ; lay with the dust
His dungeon walls, and give him back to freedom ;
Or from the very gallows—

AGNES, (*with a shudder.*)

O dread Heaven !

BLAKE.

In spite of all their guards, bear him away
In triumph to his grandsire's rock-built home.

ARTHUR.

Give me thy kerns, and we will teach these curs
To open never more on noble game.

BLAKE.

No, by thy leave, that duty shall be mine.
Go to thy cousin. Bid him be of cheer.
No hair of his shall ever come to harm.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.*The prison. WALTER alone.*

WALTER.

'Tis night without the prison walls. So judge I
From the unbreathing silence that now presses
So heavily on all around me, not
Because the light's withdrawn that cheered of late
This dismal place, for day ne'er enters here.
And Night has given peace to all the land.
The weary hind, and o'ertasked artizan,
Forgetful of their toil, and care, and want,
Have laid them down to dream of happiness.
The widow to her breast her infant folds,
And sleeps, and he that's gone is at her side,
When she doth smile, and think the truth a dream.
The sick man even hath forgot his moan :

And, save the guilty, all short respite find
From woe. For him there's no forgetfulness.
Sharp thorns are in his pillow; and his heart
Hath at its core the worm that never dies.
O for one hour of unremembering sleep!
One night of darkness that would from my gaze
Shut out that form which, turn me where I will,
Is still before me! Must it be thus ever?
Alas! alas! to what a narrow space
My *ever* now is dwindled. A few hours,
And the Great Mother, taking to her bosom
Her suffering child, shall soothe him into quiet.
Then shall I rest? Ah, no! Not in the grave
Can there be rest for one blood-stained as I,
Unless the bitter waters of repentance
Have washed away his guilt!

Enter ARTHUR.

Welcome, dear cousin.

Thou kindly com'st to gladden with thy presence
The convict's cell, and bless his parting hour.
But how is it thou com'st alone? My mother?
And Agnes? Will not they too see me?

ARTHUR.

Yes.

But, Walter, not in this most wretched place.
They wait thee where no walls shall from thee shut
The pure, free air of Heaven.

WALTER.

What canst thou mean?

ARTHUR.

That thou shalt walk abroad in freedom yet.

WALTER.

O, Arthur, mock me not! Kindle not hope,
Only to render darker my despair.

ARTHUR.

I bid thee hope, because I know thy hope
Shall not be disappointed.

WALTER.

O my heart,
Bound not so wildly! Let not love of life
Lure thee to grasp at that thou canst not reach.
Alas! alas! nor guilt, nor penitence
Hath power to sunder the strong links that bind
The young and loving to the things of earth.
And I am young, and, Arthur, I have loved—
And still do love—with all my being's strength.
And 'tis so terrible, leaving behind
The treasures of the heart, to go alone
Into the cold, dark grave—and be forgotten!
Then cheat me not with hope at this late hour,
Or I shall die when undeceived!

Enter LYNCH and PRIEST.

My father !

Thou com'st to bring me life ?

LYNCH.

Ay, life eternal ;—

Hast thou had grace to ask for it from Heaven ;—

Alas, I cannot promise other life.

And, O my son ! let not the love of that

Which, even while we look on't, passeth from us,

Loosen thy hold on life that shall endure

When this vain world, to which the heart so clingeth,

Shall be the Nothing whence 'twas called at first ;

Nor leave my wretched age the harrowing thought,

When I have yielded thee unto the laws,

That they have slain thy soul as well as body.

WALTER, (*covering his face, and falling on his knees.*)

O, Arthur, it was cruel to deceive me !

ARTHUR, (*aside to WALTER.*)

Deceive thee did I not :—There still is hope.

WALTER, (*rising, and embracing him.*)

None, none for me ! farewell !

[*Exit ARTHUR.*]

[*After a pause, to the PRIEST.*]

Thou, holy father,

For the few hours that I may still call mine,

Wilt stay with me, and aid me with thy counsels,

To meet my doom as may become a Christian.

LYNCH.

I too will stay with thee this last sad night!
And, as I've watched by thee in happy childhood,
Will watch once more ;—but with how changed a spirit !

PRIEST.

Let us with prayer our solemn watch begin.

[They kneel.]

A C T , V.

SCENE I.

A retired part of the city. TIRLOGH, CAHIR, MIHIL, and CITIZENS.

TIRLOGH.

Ye know, my friends, for what we are assembled.
Within a stone's throw of the spot whereon
We stand, a murder;—though the deed may have
Another name, it is no less a murder,
For all the sanction of the law, than if
In heat of passion I my fellow-man
Should slay;—a murder on the coming morn
Shall be committed, if ye step not forth
To stay the acting of so foul a crime.
I need not speak to you of Walter Lynch;
For no one here knows not the poor man's friend—
Long tried and never failing. Who among you
E'er knew distress that he refused to share?
Or asked for aid which was denied by him?
And not alone your friend in time of trial;
But heartsome sharer of your merry games,
And loved by all for the unfailing sunshine
His presence cast on your festivities.
O ye would miss him should mischance befall him.
Well, he—the generous friend—the gay companion—

Must die—more like a dog than Christian man—
Unless ye kindly aid me to prevent it.

CAHIR.

I do not wish his death;—no, Heaven forbid!
Yet every man should suffer for his crimes.

TIRLOGH.

Thou mean'st not that. Thou, Cahir, hast a son,—
A youth our very noblest might be proud of,
So have I often heard poor Walter say—

CAHIR.

'Twas like him. He had still a kindly word
For all; and my poor Phadrig loved him much.

TIRLOGH.

Now had thy son—by some unguarded act—
And who is always master of himself?—
Done that would place his life in jeopardy,
When thou should'st see him at the gallows' foot,
Would'st stand—because he had for once done wrong—
And see him mount to shame and sure destruction,
Without one effort to avert his doom?

CAHIR.

One effort? I would drag him from the scaffold,
Or I would die in the attempt to do it.

TIRLOGH.

I know thou would'st. The father who would not
Deserveth not the name. Yet, by his office,

Is Lynch denied the blessed privilege
Enjoyed by every father in the land,
To turn aside the shaft aimed at the heart
Of him he loves ; but must—writhe as he may—
Yield up his son a victim to the Law.
O men ! O fathers ! will ye that a *father*
Should be compelled, by stern, relentless duty,
To do such outrage to a father's heart—
To be the murderer of his only child !—
When ye, by simply stretching forth your hands,
Can save him from such wretchedness ?

MIHIL.

But tell us

What thou would'st have us do, and we will do it.

TIRLOGH.

Why, only this. Let each man here attend
Among the crowd, that will before the prison
Be gathered, to behold the agonies
Of a poor fellow-mortal, which—disgrace
To human nature !—even tender woman
Finds pastime in ! and when I shall pronounce
Our city's name, rush ye upon the guards,
And overpower them. This you may do easily.
For they are men ; and in their painful duty
Be sure men's hearts are not. Then seize the prisoner.
And when we have him with us once again,
We'll take good care to place him beyond danger.

MIHIL.

But should the guards be reinforced ?

TIRLOGH.

No fear.

That would require the order of the Mayor ;
And rather would he ye succeed than fail.
But, at the worst, the followers of his uncle—
Blake of the Hills—are now without the city,
Ready to battle for young Walter's life,
Who will come joyfully to your assistance,
And aid the cause of Right 'gainst any odds.

MIHIL.

Say nothing more. We all of us are ready
To do thy bidding. Are we not ?

ALL.

We are.

TIRLOGH.

I cannot speak my thanks ; but in my heart
The memory of your truth shall never die.
But let us now disperse, and each return
Unto his home, and wait the hour that's near
And so, good-night to all.

ALL, (*as they disperse.*)

Good-night, good-night.

[*Exeunt followed by* TIRLOGH.]

SCENE II.

An apartment in the house of LYNCH. Enter BLAKE, DAME MARGARET, and ARTHUR.

BLAKE.

All is prepared. My kerns but wait the word,
To march into the city, and the prison
Must pass into our hands in half an hour;
And Walter then is free. To this my word
Is pledged; and that has ne'er been falsified.

DAME MARGARET.

And may not I go with you?

BLAKE.

'Twere scarce safe.

But when we shall have gained admittance, then
Shall Arthur here, with thee and Agnes, come
To join us.

ARTHUR.

But can I be of no service?
In his great peril, shall my cousin owe
Nothing to me for his deliverance?

BLAKE.

'Thy aid we need not. Stay, then, where thou art,
And seek, with the glib tongue with which thou'rt gifted,
To make the halting hours move swiftly by.

Enter AGNES.

DAME MARGARET.

Come, rouse thee, child ;—the hour is near at hand
Which gives our darling Walter back to us.
And dost thou in the sunshine bow the head,
That through the storm so bravely was uplifted?

AGNES.

Alas, my mother !—let me call thee so,
For, since my father hath to his reward
Been called, I have than thee no other parent !—
The hour, whose near approach thou hail'st with joy,
Fills my distrusting heart with sad forebodings.
I fain would listen to the voice of Hope,
But her low whisperings by the cries are drowned
Of desolate Despair !

DAME MARGARET.

My brother here
Will tell thee, there is not a doubt to cast
A shadow on the path that leads to safety.

BLAKE.

Believe me, girl, ere tolling of the hour
Which was to be the call to pious ehristians
To pray for one departed, Walter Lynch
Shall stand as free as any man in Galway.

AGNES.

O that I too could think so !

DAME MARGARET.

Unbeliever,

Will nought convince thee?

Enter TIRLOGH.

Welcome, welcome, Tirlogh.

Thy looks, without thy tongue, have told how well
The citizens have answered to thy call.

TIRLOGH.

As they have ever answered, when appeal
Is made, in simple phrase, to honest hearts.
They will not stand with folded arms and see
A deed committed would the world appal;
But, siding with the weak against the strong,
Against high-handed Wrong with simple Right,
Are ready from the iron grasp of Law
To wrest its victim, when they hear the signal,
And give dear Walter back to life and freedom.

DAME MARGARET.

Heaven bless their honest hearts and willing hands!
True Justice never suffers in their keeping.
But, Agnes, come. We'll to my oratory.
Even joy may need with prayer be sanctified.

BLAKE.

Pray an you will. Come, Tirlogh, thou with me.

*[Exeunt DAME MARGARET, AGNES, and ARTHUR, at one door,
and BLAKE and TIRLOGH at another.]*

SCENE III.

The Prison. LYNCH, PRIEST, and WALTER.

WALTER.

I thank thee, holy father, for the strength
Thy prayers and blessings have to me imparted.
Now, that the grave is yawning at my feet,
Its cold and dreary passage I no more
Do fear, as when I viewed it from afar ;
For thou assurest me, that true repentance
Can never fail of gaining Heaven's approval,
And through it may the sinner hope for pardon.
And O, I beg of thee, when I am gone,
In daily ministering at God's holy altar,
Do not forget to join my name with his,
Whom my rash act hath all untimely sent
Into the presence of his Judge and mine,
That both the victim and his murderer
May 'scape the punishment their sins deserve.

PRIEST.

Fear not, my son ;—I never will forget thee.
And if the earnest prayers of one poor sinner
May for another be by Heaven regarded,
Thou shalt find mercy and not chastisement.

WALTER, (*to* LYNCH.)

And now, my father, ere I quit for ever
A world whose blessings I have so abused,

Upon my knees (*kneeling*) I pray thee pardon me
The shame that's fallen on thine honoured head,
And the keen anguish that thy heart hath pierced,
Through my sad crime, and bless me ere I die.

LYNCH, (*raising and embracing him.*)

My son! my son! as I do pardon thee,
May I be pardoned! and may Infinite Mercy
Bless thee, my boy, as doth thy father bless thee!

[*To the OFFICER who enters.*]

Well, sirrah, what would'st thou?

OFFICER.

The hour, my lord,
Named for the execution is arrived.

LYNCH.

Arrived? 'Tis false! Where are the signs of day?
Dost hear the trampling of the feet of those
Who are abroad before the stars grow dim,
To win by daily toil their daily bread?
No, all is silent, save the hollow sounds
These vaulted dungeons give in answering me.
And then, where is the sun? Seest aught of him?
Yet would not his bold eye have looked into
These heavy mists, that render dim our torches,
And scattered them, if it were as thou sayest?

OFFICER.

You do forget, my lord; no sound of that
Which passes in the street can reach us here;

And, save the blaze that shall consume the world,
No light can find its way into these dungeons.

LYNCH.

I did forget :—God help me !—I forget
All, all, save that I am the most accursed
And wretched thing on whom the load of life
Was ever laid ! 'neath which both heart and brain
Are crushed ! No wonder I forget all else !

PRIEST.

Great are thy trials :—let thy patience be
As great, and thine shall be the martyr's crown.

LYNCH, (*impatiently.*)

The martyr's crown ! O father, was there one,
Of all the glorious host baptized in blood,
Who bore a martyrdom like this of mine ?
What is the anguish of the dying body—
That is no more remembered when it ceases—
Compared to this which wrings th' immortal spirit ?
O give me strength, sweet Heaven ! that I yield not
To the despair that tuggeth at my heart !

WALTER.

Dear father, be more calm. Make not thy son
A coward seem when he should play the man.
It easier were to meet my fate at once,
Than see the wretchedness my guilt has caused.

LYNCH.

Poor boy ! thou justly dost admonish me.

Yes, I'll be calm. Despair should ever be so !

[Shouts without.]

Enter GAOLER.

GAOLER.

My lord, my lord, the prison is beset
By crowds of citizens, with bludgeons armed,
And at their head young master's foster-brother,
Tirlough the Red ; and with them that fierce chief,
Blake of the Hills—the brother of your lady—
Whose wild retainers, like a mountain flood,
Have come upon us, threat'ning quick destruction
To every thing that shall oppose their course ;
And all are loud demanding that we yield
The pris'ner to them, ere they cast to earth
This pile, of which they swear they will not leave
One stone upon another. Hark ! they come.

[Shouts continued, with the noise of battering at the gate]

Enter SECOND OFFICER.

SECOND OFFICER.

The gates are in possession of the mob ;
The avenues are closed against the guards ;
And on his way the executioner
The citizens have seized, and all declare
That he shall hang before the prisoner.

GAOLER.

O my good lord, I would advise you yield

To their demands, and set the prisoner free.

LYNCH.

What, have I heard a mother plead in vain;—
Denied the prayers of an affianced bride,
And silenced the deep cry of mine own heart,
To stain at last my soul with damning guilt
By rude enforcement of a brutish mob?
O Walter, could I save thee without crime,
With my own life I'd gladly ransom thine,
But as I cannot, wilt thou that these men
Now drive me into toils whence no escape
Is left?

WALTER.

No, father. I'm content to die.
Then let me satisfy the claims of Justice,
That peace may be restored to all I love.

LYNCH.

Peace? Peace? O never to this heart shall Peace
Return!—but desolate—for ever desolate!
Till changed to dust, shall be her former dwelling,
When she and thou have gone from me to Heaven!

[*The shouts sound nearer.*]

WALTER.

Come, let us not delay. They press upon us,
And will be here anon. Quick, let us go.

LYNCH, (*wildly.*)

Go where, my boy? Eternal Heaven! to death?

WALTER.

It must be so.

LYNCH.

It must; dread Heaven! it must!

[Walks with WALTER towards the door.]

GAOLER.

The passage hence is blocked up by the people.

WALTER.

Is there no other?

GAOLER.

Yes. Pass through this vault;

[Opening a door at the back of the cell.]

And at the end you'll find a stairway leading

Thence to the platform. Follow, and I'll show it.

LYNCH.

One last embrace!

[Falls upon the neck of WALTER. Releases him; and after a struggle with himself, to the FIRST OFFICER.]

Do that which must be.

FIRST OFFICER.

Not for a kingdom's ransom would I do

The office here of executioner.

LYNCH, *(to SECOND OFFICER.)*

Friend, wilt not thou?

SECOND OFFICER.

My lord, I'd sooner drain

My heart's blood, drop by drop, than raise a hand

Against a life so sacred.

[*Battering and shouts renewed.*]

TIRLOGH, (*without.*)

Forward, men!

Strike with a will! The gates already yield;—
And must give way!

BLAKE, (*without.*)

That's bravely done, my kerns!

Forward again! We soon shall be rewarded,
By wresting from a murderous father's grasp
His noble son!

[*SOLDIERS shout exultingly.*]

LYNCH, (*distractedly.*)

To what will these men drive me!

Is't not enough that I was made to judge
A life away in which mine own was bound;
But will they force me to put forth my hand
To do the hangman's duty? Spare, O God!

[*Shouts, followed by a crash.*]

WALTER, (*eagerly to LYNCH.*)

One way is left thee to redeem thine oath.

(*To the GAOLER.*) Show us the secret passage.

FIRST OFFICER, (*rushing before them.*)

No, O no!

LYNCH, (*seizing him furiously, and casting him aside.*)

Away! or I will tear thee limb from limb!

[*Exeunt LYNCH, WALTER, and GAOLER, by the secret passage.*]

FIRST OFFICER.

O Heaven! this is too dreadful! Holy father,
Wilt thou stand by and see this murder done?

PRIEST.

What can I do? All that I could I've done.
But arguments and prayers have been in vain.

FIRST OFFICER.

I'll make, at least, one effort to prevent it.

[*Rushes out.*

Shouts and a tremendous crash, and then enter BLAKE, TIRLOGH,
SOLDIERS, *and* CITIZENS.

TIRLOGH.

Safe, safe at last!

BLAKE.

My nephew, thou art free!

Enter ARTHUR, DAME MARGARET, *and* AGNES.

DAME MARGARET.

My son!—where is my son?

AGNES.

Where, where is Walter?

SECOND OFFICER, (*after a pause, and pointing to the
secret passage.*)

Gone to death!

TIRLOGH.

Thou art deceived.

[*Rushes out.*

AGNES.

Sweet mother!

[Falls, and is supported by ARTHUR]

ARTHUR.

Nay, cheer thee, gentle one,—this cannot be.

DAME MARGARET.

Who does not know it cannot? Man, thou ravest!

PRIEST.

Alas, my daughter! he too truly speaks.

TIRLOGH, (*returning.*)

Too late! too late! The fatal deed was done
Ere I arrived! So horrible a sight
Has eye ne'er witnessed! By the father's hand
Is slain his only son!

ARTHUR.

O CHRISTIAN LAW!

This murder is thy work!

[To AGNES, who has fainted.]

Poor, blighted flower,

Thou ne'er shalt raise thy head up to the sun!

[Lays her on WALTER'S couch, and kneels by her side.]

DAME MARGARET.

Dead? dead? My Walter? O ye seek to fright me.
Fly, brother, fly! (*to BLAKE*) or these will drive me mad.

[Exit BLAKE.]

He is not dead—the young!—the beautiful!

The gentle!—the beloved!—could *he* die,
And leave his mother here all desolate?
Good Tirlogh;—thou didst love him;—was not he
Thy foster-brother?—say he is not dead.

TIRLOGH.

Dear lady, that I could!

DAME MARGARET.

I know thou canst.

Then say he is not dead—dear Tirlogh!—say it,
And here I will kneel down, and worship thee.

[*To BLAKE, who returns*

O he is safe!

BLAKE.

Yes, safe—in Heaven, my sister.

DAME MARGARET.

O ye do all conspire to torture me.

But I will go—

[*She is going, when LYNCH, followed by the GAOLER and
FIRST OFFICER, enters, bearing the dead body of WALTER.*]

O Heaven! my sight is blasted!

[*Throws herself into the arms of BLAKE.*

LYNCH, (*staggering forward.*)

Ye have it as ye would, ye murderous crew!

This is your work, and ye may glory in it.

[*To the SECOND OFFICER, who goes up to him.*

Approach us not. He now is mine—all mine.

The Law is satisfied—it has his life—

And this poor outraged form it leaves to me.

[Kneels on one knee, and rests the body on the other

Walter, my son! Walter! Wilt thou not speak
To thy poor father? Hast thou not one word
For him to whom the lisplings of thy childhood;—
Thy boyhood's ringing laugh;—thy manhood's tone,
Were music that did fill his foolish heart
With joy 'till it ran o'er? My brave, brave boy!
The ruffler now may smite the white-haired man,
And not a hand shall smite him in return,
While craven caitiffs boast o'er thy young valour!
O true and loving heart! when to this bosom
Wast ever pressed and gav'st no answering throb?
O God! O God! the meanest thing that crawls
Hath something of its own that it can love,
While thou must lie in a dishonoured grave—
Dug by the hand of him who loved thee best—
Leaving thy Judge—thy Executioner—
Thy FATHER! all alone in this bleak world,
To live in agony!—and still to live!

[Falls insensible upon the body

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